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**Interview with Crecensio “Joey” Morales
Interviewed by Pam Sporn and Tami Gold**

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[Start of recorded material at 00:00]

Pam Sporn What years did you arrive at Brooklyn College?

Crecensio Morales Well, I actually had two episodes at Brooklyn College. My first one was back in 1967 I just graduated from high school, Boys High School, here in Brooklyn. It was all boys and was considered one of the worst schools academically throughout the whole city. And I had a lot of difficulty getting into a college and I finally got into SEEK program. My mother was a community activist and she found out about the SEEK program which was having its first class enter Brooklyn College at the time. So I came in at '67. Just at the beginning of September, I was lucky to come in but at that time, they were only admitting us into night school, I wasn't considered a part of day school, because it was a non-traditional program, very non traditional program for academically and economically disadvantaged students, of which I was both.

Pam Sporn And so you had to go to school at night at Brooklyn College.

Crecensio Morales We were considered part of SGS and, our courses, were not credit bearing courses. At the beginning, we would have to do a series of courses at least about 14 credits before we could start getting actual credit for courses. So it was more like a continuing education at that time, SGS was considered School of General Studies.

Pam Sporn So let me just back up a little bit and...you were a student at Boys High School. Could you tell me a little bit about the makeup of the student body and what your life was like at at Boys High School?

Boys High School was at the time that I attended was about 85% Black and Latino. We had maybe about 5% White and then some Asian students, Caribbean students, the rest, but actually it was a population of minority students, academically challenged.

Pam Sporn What kind of courses did they teach you in high school about Puerto Rican culture or history? I'm interested in that.

Crecensio Morales At the time, we didn't have much in terms of Puerto Rican studies or anything about Puerto Rico. We had one chapter in, one sociology book, which actually was called History and it was part of European history, then part of the history of Spain. So we were include it as just part of a property of Spain, and then the United States, but it was all covered in a very small paragraph. Nothing to speak of.

Pam Sporn And how did you feel as a Puerto Rican student at Boys High in the '60s, in the 1960s, what was that like?

Crecensio Morales It was very difficult at that time, because at that time, I didn't really want to be Puerto Rican. At that time, I had problems with speaking the language. And I was only communicating with my parents in English and they will communicate with me in Spanish. And to that extent, we got along. My parents were involved in community activities so I didn't have much of a background in terms of the history of Puerto Rico. The only thing that we really did have was the music. And that, they played a lot of different trios and different bands from Puerto Rico, but nothing without much from here. So I didn't have a feeling of being Puerto Rican in the sense of history and culture. I had the sense of the music and my friends were all Puerto Ricans. So we didn't necessarily draw on the history and culture of Puerto Rico. But we did have the parents who inculcated to us certain values and things about the food or Puerto Rico, a little bit about the history about the struggles that they had in terms of the economy, and why they had to leave Puerto Rico because my parents had what they called a Fonda. "Fonda" was a small restaurant in Puerto Rico, and they were allied with the sugarcane factories. But when the sugar cane, factories started failing and the economy started changing in Puerto Rico, they had to close the "Fonda," and my father had to come to New York, and he came at first by himself. So this is the type of thing that we knew about Puerto Rico. It wasn't anything that was historical or cultural.

Pam Sporn [00:05:41]
Can you tell me when you got your draft notice and what it felt like? Do you remember the date that you got it and where you were and what that felt like?

- Crecensio Morales The way the draft was working at the time was there was a lottery at the federal level, and the lottery was pegged to the birthdays. So the individual balls represented the birthdays, the month and the day of birth. So my lottery, which came up, was for April 14th. And so my birthday was actually August 15. But I was called with the group of people who were to enter into the service, on April 14, so...
- Pam Sporn How did you feel when you got the draft notice?
- Crecensio Morales When I got the draft notice I was very, very unhappy, apprehensive, at the same time, I thought about not going and being a conscientious objector. But that didn't work for me at the time. I also thought about going to Canada, but I didn't, like many people of my time, not many, but a lot of the people who were asked to go into the service and conscientious objectors, they went to Canada. I didn't know anybody in Canada, being a Puerto Rican, all the people I knew was in Brooklyn, New York. And the other thing was, I wasn't willing to go to jail. Because for 18 years, I tried to stay out of jail. So I wasn't voluntarily going to jail. So in my mind, I had no options except to accept going into the service.
- Pam Sporn Why were you opposed to the war in Vietnam?
- Crecensio Morales I was opposed to the war of Vietnam because I felt that it was actually a war opportunity at the time, people were discussing why we were there, and no one to give me a real good answer. It was a question of, versus communism and democracy and I understood those concepts to a certain extent. But they had very little meaning in terms of being a young man from the ghetto in Brooklyn. So I didn't...I lost the answer the question...
- Pam Sporn Was your opposition to the war in Vietnam in any way connected to feelings about the the relationship between Puerto Rico and United States?
- Crecensio Morales My opposition did have something to, did have to do with the way Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States. At that time I understood the concept of being a captured nation. And that we were a captured people and we were subjected to the laws of the United States. However, I was living here, and so I needed to follow the laws. So I felt very conflicted about going to the service. And I knew people who didn't go to the service who were conscientious objectors. And so I was surrounded by people of having varied opinions on so I was making up my own decisions about the war.
- Pam Sporn Tell me, you were drafted and then where did you end up?

Crecensio Morales

Well the first day I went to the service was here, at Brooklyn, Fort Hamilton Brooklyn, that was the induction station. Actually, I was, got there late because my friends were throwing me a great going away party, and they all decided that they were going to accompany me to the draft station. We entered there and of course, the first thing was I had some drill sergeants screaming at me, and I'm saying, you know, don't scream at me. And then he screamed louder so then I knew I had to shut up. And they put us in lines. And, they took us to the first station, the health stations where we were examined, and it was my first experience going through a very structured environment. And so I felt very uncomfortable and ill at ease and I really wanted to rebel. But I understood that if you rebelled at any point, you were going to wind up in jail. So I didn't do that. Went through the process of induction, which was inspection of all parts of your body to giving you clothes that don't fit, boots that don't fit. You go from there and you're assigned to bunkers of 40 people in 40 beds. And it's the first time I have a group environment to sleep in and there was one that was very uncomfortable and something that I was almost very angry that I was going to rebel, but I guess I thought the better of it and just went along with the program.

Once I was inducted, we went from there to Fort Dix for basic training. And then the basic training. We went through all the things of modifying our behavior, learning how to do things the army way. You brush your teeth the army way, you take a shower the army way, you shave the army way, everything was going to be the army way. And everybody was going to look alike. And the whole purpose of it was to break down all your civilian attitudes and habits, as the drill sergeant would say, says you're no longer a civilian. You're now in the army, you're the property of the United States government, and you will conduct yourself in a manner accordingly. And so they gave us all this basic training. A physical training was arduous for me, because at that time, I was a little bit heavy as I am now. But I went through the whole process, and I could see that it was hard for me, but it was harder for a lot of other individuals. And I saw individuals who physically broke down and emotionally broke down. And so I saw that I needed to take control of my situation and control what I could. So after basic training, I was sent down to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. They did not give me any advanced training. So when I went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, they sent me down to work in an office.

And from that, they gave me orders after six months, that I was going to be sent to Vietnam. And my first thing was, but what is my father going to say because my mother had died, he's alone. And he seems to be, I guess, outwardly okay with it. He wasn't like, overly excited or anxious or expressive, expression wise, he didn't express much. But I could tell it he had some concern about it. I had some concern about it but my philosophy was, I lived through the streets in Brooklyn, and they didn't break me

down and if I can survive here, I'll be able to survive anywhere. And that's my attitude that I went with. When I went over to Vietnam. I went over to Vietnam, first as a private. When I got to Vietnam, I was made a Corporal and during my stay in Vietnam, I made it to the rank of Sergeant, which I did in the shortest amount of time possible. And in Vietnam I was sent to do supply clerk but I actually spent my time on the perimeter of the camp. I was sent to camp, well, I entered Vietnam through Cameron Bay, which is in the south. Since I didn't have any specific training, it seems that the government didn't want to invest money into me so they just sent me as cannon fodder, as they say or Individual replacement is the technical term the army used. I wasn't sent over as part of a company. I was sent as an individual and my experience was that as an individual, you're going to go into different places, and each one of those places have different needs or they would accept people and none of them would accept me.

[00:15:45]

I went from there, from Cameron Bay to Long Binh, from Long Binh to Bien Hoa from Bien Hoa to Nha Trang from Nha Trang to Tuy Hoa, from Tuy Hoa to Qui Nhon, so finally I went to the worst station of the whole division of the army that I was in, the 52nd combat Aviation Brigade, and Pleiku which is in the central highlands of Vietnam. We were 40 miles from the Cambodian border. Our camp was basically Cobra attack helicopters, and Huey gunships and my job was really to protect the hardware. So I was sent that night to do this camp security, which I did on a post with two other individuals. We had a machine gun, we had grenade launchers, and we had, M-16s. And we had also access to claymore mines. So we were one little, tough, little post. And we were like, about several hundred yards from the next post. And we were right on the front of the line of the perimeter of the camp overlooking the valley. And sometimes we would be looking down the valley and at night, we would just have to go through an exercise of firing into the valley to make sure that there was no one out there to attacking the camp.

The camp was attacked a couple of times, actually, I saw actual rounds of mortar rounds coming at me while I was in the back of the camp, and so I had total experience while I was there, and I was there as one individual. I was not there as part of any company and being the only Latino assigned to my specific company, it was particularly difficult because I had a range of individuals with different opinions from different parts of the United States. And it was really one of the first times that I really experienced discrimination in to the extent that I experienced a level of hate that I'd never experienced before. And so my experiences in Vietnam were varied. It went from, "oh don't... we don't like you, we don't like Puerto Ricans, we"...they didn't even know what a Puerto Rican was. They thought that when I had my flag from Puerto Rico, which has one star and then the stripes, they thought that was actually Texas and that I was Mexican.

Okay, because it was the Lone Star State right, Texas is the Lone Star State.

Pam Sporn So you experienced this discrimination in Vietnam, as a Puerto Rican.

Crecensio Morales There was a time that, I had another experience, which, during my one period of time there, there was a lot of strife between African Americans and the White troops and that happened in various camps in Vietnam and there was some violence. And one day, actually was night time, I was stationed with two individuals, they were many a White company that I was in and we were told that there was a group of African Americans running amok, supposedly running amok, and they were beating up White soldiers, which really was a hoax. But when it happened at the moment, we thought it was real. And I was very conflicted about it, because I'm a minority, how am I going to go out and be fighting against other minority people. And at the same time, I have to think about self defense and being with a White camp. That was one of the issues that I had to deal with. Other one was a one time I went to the EM club, the Enlisted Men's club and there was a White soldier and he was slapping a Mexican-American, young man who didn't speak a lot of English, and he was slapping him in the face and I told him to stop it. And he told me, "Chico doesn't mind." And I said, well, I mind. And we wound up fighting that day. But it was a question that I couldn't tolerate, the question of that discrimination against people.

On the other hand, when I was traveling around from the different camps, I could go from one camp to another and as soon as I came off, say, the helicopter or the bus, whatever means of transportation and I encountered the first group of Latinos, they immediately saw me and they would wave to me say, come on, come on. And they will have me sit down and we would eat food that they prepared cause a lot of the Latinos, or Puerto Ricans who couldn't speak a lot of English they had them do jobs that didn't require language, and one of them was to be a cook. So we had a lot of Puerto Ricans, men who do our cooking, then that translates a lot of Puerto Rican men, after grad...leaving the service to become people who were good cooks, my father and other people that I knew, uncles, they were great cooks. So they learned that.

Pam Sporn So overall, what was the greatest impact that your experience in Vietnam had on you?

Crecensio Morales The greatest impact that was, first of all, that I didn't want stay in the service. And I was being solicited right down until the very day. I didn't want to be in the service. The other thing was to come back to the states and not having had any real training in any kind of profession, other than being a security guard. And the other part of it was that on the out-

processing the sergeants and were telling us that, when you get to the airport, you should watch out that there are people there that are going to beat you up because you're a soldier. Don't wear your uniform, because people will beat you up. They hate you out there, and they tried to instill this fear in the soldiers and this animosity against people who were either peace activist or even different, and from the Hare Krishnas. They were telling us the Hare Krishnas, who are people who follow Buddhism, that's why....the Hare Krishnas, they follow Buddhism, that the people were going to beat us up also. So they were doing some kind of absurd propaganda to try to get us to get back into the states. So it was a thing of being not prepared to come back.

Pam Sporn So when you came back. You came you, you were opposed to the war before you went, then you were there, had your experiences there. When you came back, were you still opposed to the war? And what, did you find the activists being hostile to you?

Crecensio Morales I was opposed to the war before I went in there. I was opposed to the war while I was in there, and I wore my peace activist sign. And I was, expressed my opposition, to, when I was there. And I was opposed to the war when I left and when I came back here, and I joined some of the activities against the war. I didn't join the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, because I was already tired of being in a military organization. So I didn't join, but I was opposed to the war and I did participate in anti war activities and protests.

Tami Gold [00:24:57]
When you talk about the war, can you say the Vietnam War?

Crecensio Morales Yes. Okay.

Pam Sporn Can you just say that part again, just that one part, I was opposed to the Vietnam War before I went and...

Crecensio Morales So I was opposed, I was opposed to the Vietnam War, before I went to the war, and I was opposed to the Vietnam War while I was there, and I was opposed to Vietnam War, afterwards, and I joined protests against the war, against the Vietnam War.

Pam Sporn Tell me about how you went back to Brooklyn College. When did you go back to Brooklyn College?

Crecensio Morales I left the service in December of '71. I entered Viet...., I entered Brooklyn College after I left the service in 1973. So, I left at '68 came back in 1973 and that's when I started school.

Pam Sporn And what was the environment on Brooklyn College campus like for you when you came in 1973, coming as a Puerto Rican who had an experience of being in Vietnam.

Crecensio Morales When I came back to Brooklyn College in 1973, it was a little bit different because they had already established a Puerto Rican Studies Department. And so I gravitated towards the Puerto Rican Studies Department. And I knew people who are working there at the Puerto Rican Studies Department. So I had a place to go and talk to people. Aside from that, there was no other places in Brooklyn College that actually I was able to find any information that would help me go through the process of being a student there at Brooklyn College.

Pam Sporn So it was the Puerto Rican Studies Department that gave you the counseling that you needed to be a student?

Crecensio Morales The Puerto Rican Studies Department helped me quite a bit because it helped me navigate the structures and the administration of Brooklyn College. At the same time, it gave me a group of support, people who supported me and cared that, whether I came to school or not. And so that was important to me. And it was important to me to do well, because I had people who had faith in me and had permission to do something better. And I wanted to contribute to my community.

Pam Sporn Is there a particular person that was really looking out for you in the Department that you could talk about?

Crecensio Morales There wasn't a particular person in the Puerto Rican Studies Department. Matter of fact, at the beginning of the, when I started going to the Puerto Rican Studies Department, in spite of the fact that there was people there who helped me and gave me information, and even I had some people who helped me with some of the courses because they had gone through it. I didn't feel that there was a collective consciousness of being a unit. It was a group of individuals in a particular place and doing different things. And that was between the students. The faculty, I didn't have a lot of interaction with them. Because at first I couldn't take Puerto Rican Studies courses, because I had to take an academic probation curriculum. Again, I came into a situation where I was studying to do non-credit courses, to try to get my skills to the level that I needed to, to be successful.

Pam Sporn But at the same time, you said the Puerto Rican Studies Department was important that it was there and that you felt that it provided you a space.

Crecensio Morales The Puerto Rican Studies Department had, the, some resources that were important for me to utilize. They had access to materials that

supplemented my knowledge of Puerto Rico. They had curriculum...let me go back to this.

[00:29:49]

It was a real confusing year, when I came back to Brooklyn College in the Puerto Rican Studies Department. When I had returned, the department was working, but it was lacking leadership. The chair people had resigned and there was empty space at the level of chairperson. Therefore, courses were being given, but it felt that there was no unity there. So while, individuals helped me, the department as a whole could not. So I felt that there was a need for us to begin to work with, disappointed because, let me do that again.

I felt that there was a need that to work with the Puerto Rican Studies Department, that there was a place for me to take my skills to take my knowledge that I could apply to assist in the department while at the same time I could benefit from being in the department.

Pam Sporn When you came back to Brooklyn College, did you get involved in the Puerto Rican Alliance?

Crecensio Morales When I started working with the Puerto Rican Studies Department, in terms of the committees, the recruitment committee and the curriculum committee, I joined those committees. Even though there was no chairperson at the time. There were individual instructors who were in those areas and they were in charge of those. So I started gravitating to those people and I started working with those, and through them, I got to learn about the Puerto Rican Alliance. And then, as I started working with the issue of the leadership of the Department of Puerto Rican Studies, I started to realize that we needed to get the Puerto Rican Alliance directly involved in the activity because at one point, it was Puerto Rican Alliance doing one thing, at the other side, it was Puerto Rican Studies Department doing its thing. I felt that there was a need that the Puerto Rican Alliance needed to support the Puerto Rican Studies Department to get a chairperson in the position.

Pam sporn What was...what was your role in in the takeover of the President's Office? Saying that there were, it got to a point where students took over the President's Office because of controversy over the Puerto Rican Studies Department. Can you tell me about that?

Crecensio Morales It started, our struggle started in, Okay. We first had a problem that the Department needed to have a leadership and we were working with the Puerto Rican Alliance, to try to find out what was the process for electing somebody to be a chair. And we had our understanding that Puerto Rican Studies would be able to do that itself. But what happened is that the

president of the college, constituted a search committee and didn't allow the Puerto Rican Studies Department to participate in the search committee, at first. And then when they allowed us to be in the committee and we demanded that the Puerto Rican studies, the Department be, were represented as the majority of members of that committee. The majority made some recommendations to the President as to the chairperson, the administration decided that they would have their own person come in and override the decision of the committee that was constituted by students and faculty of Puerto Rican Studies, along with college faculty.

When that happened, it was decided that we needed to take some kind of direct action, and that we could no longer continue business as usual within the college, that this college could not continue to roll over the students' decisions and that the students' desires and the needs of the students, therefore, we went to the Puerto Rican Alliance. And we said that we needed to start making pickets and protests and things like that. And we constituted a Central Committee of individuals from the Department, from PRA, and from other student organizations. And this Central Committee decided that, along with the protests, the peaceful protests that we had, we had to have a little bit more militant actions that would bring attention to the and put pressure on the administration to at least listen to our (thank you), to listen to our demands and to adhere to what we were talking about. We constituted a small group of individuals that formed the first group of individuals that would enter into the President's Office and asked for a meeting of the President.

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When the President did not allow us to meet with him, we opened up the door and we asked all the students that were downstairs protesting to come upstairs and to come meet the President. At that point, we entered into the President's Office, and we said politely to the Secretary, "this is a takeover of this office, please put all your stuff away, lock it up. And you take the rest of the day off, and we're going into the President's Office." and that's when I went out into the balcony of the President's Office with the megaphone and announced to the campus that we presently have control of the President's Office, and that we will not relinquish it, until we meet with the President, he hears our demands. And that took a day, before the president even came in, we received a lot of threats that the police were going to come they were going to eject us from the campus and when that was sent out to the student body. Instead of students running away, the student started coalescing, and coming together, and they joined the picket lines. And they formed the first line of the defense for the students who were inside. When the President finally came and said he wanted to solve this, we said, well you're going to listen to us and we began giving his demands.

That was the initiation of a two year struggle to try to get a chairperson of the Puerto Rican Studies Department. We picketed again, and gave him...gave back the office to the President and we said we want to have a meeting and we set up some meetings. When those meetings were not given to us, we started to have another picket line and protesting and that happened for a week, he would not meet. So our small group of forward students, went in to the Bursars Office and announced to the Bursars personnel, "this is a takeover, we want you to be feeling safe. Please put your stuff away, nothing will be destroyed, nothing will be broken. But you will have to leave the office for the day." And so we took over the office, we had the students secure the property, make sure none of the files are done. We asked faculty members to come in and to be witnesses to the fact that this was nonviolent, that it was not destructive, that we were, this was an act of civil disobedience that we had decided that business as usual could not be conducted on this campus until the demands of the students were heard and addressed.

And so at that time, we began to paper over, we used the newspaper from the King's Men of Brooklyn College, which were in the bins for free, and utilize them to cover the windows, so that we could not be seen from the outside. And we utilized the telephones of the school to call up different campuses and notify the student organizations that we needed their support, and that we needed people to come to join our picket lines. We broadcast that throughout the City University, then out to the State University, and we even had student organizations contact the University of Puerto Rico and even in the Sorbonne in Paris, and we got responses from all over, telegrams that they sent copies to us that demanded that the administration address the students' demands and that there will be a peaceful solution to the issues that were presented.

So at that time, we started getting a lot of support. The administration decided that yes, they were going to meet with us, but what they were doing, it was a stalling tactic and they were getting....(pause)

[00:40:14]

Oh, they were just starting to get injunctions. They went to the courts and they got injunctions against the students demanding that we leave the offices otherwise we would be arrested. We said that we will not leave the offices and more students joined us. The Veterans Organization joined us, Student Government joined us. We had White student groups join the protest. So we had a whole community of individuals that formed a defensive posture for the students who were inside.

Therefore, they could see that the whole campus was involved, and that this was not a question of self interest but of community interest. The

community needed to have students involved in almost every committee of the college, including employment and curriculum.

Pam Sporn Do you remember some of the slogans or chants that people were saying? You are inside the office holding, holding the office, occupying the office? People were outside, what kinds of chants were they saying, do you remember?

Crecensio Morales There was rallying cries that we utilized, "The people united will never be defeated." We said that, "Aw, beep, beep, We will not be beat." We had one against the President, which was, "Kneller, you liar. We'll set your ass on fire." And that actually came about because one day, during one of the protests the students came, and brought an effigy of the President, and they took the effigy and hanged them in the quad. And somebody actually set it a fire, in the middle of the quad. A little bit dramatic, but for us, it was a question of sending a message rather than actually really doing actions of that nature cause we had already proven that we were doing acts of civil disobedience and that we were not doing things of violence.

Pam Sporn Were you arrested?

Crecensio Morales We were arrested after the third night of occupation of the Bursars Office. We actually had, four in the morning, while students were outside, protesting and guarding and observing. We had faculty observers, we had lawyers, we had prior notice that they were going to send in the police to arrest us. But in fact, what happened is that the police allowed federal marshals to come in and be the ones who actually arrested us. Maybe because they realized that we were not criminals, that this was the act of civil disobedience. But they arrested us and took us to the court directly from the college. And at the court, the administration presented all sorts of propaganda and lies, utilizing flyers from different organizations accusing us of being a communist movement and being violent, all of which was not proven by the actions and the history of our actions.

We were sentenced to, students were sentenced to three months probation. And the faculty was sentenced to six months probation. We had about five faculty members and 39 students, and one of our students yelled out, "We are now 44, we are now BC44." And from that, when we were sentenced to the three months, we told our lawyers to tell the judge that if the faculty is getting six months probation, that the students demanded that they be sentenced to six months probation. And the judge says fine, they gave a student six months probation each. We came back to the campus after being sentenced. And as we came by subway to Flatbush Avenue station, we were met at the station by students who all joined us as we started entering campus. And to our amazement when we entered the campus, the whole campus was full of students greeting us, and one of our students,

Willy Rodriguez, came out and said, "We are BC44, we've come back to give you more." And that was one of our chants that we utilized when we went into the second occupation exactly six months after the probation was...

(pause)

Crecensio Morales

[00:45:48]

So, Willy Rodriguez said, "We are BC44, we come back to give you more!" And the chants started rising from a mountain of students, "BC 44. We've come back to give you more!" And exactly six months later, we started our pickets again. And we started going around the campus and we had a group of students and we went back into the Bursars Office and took over the Bursars Office. And since down the hall, there was the Registrar's Office, we said we're going to, we took over the Registrars Office. So at one point we had control of the whole first floor, right hand side of the building of Boylan Hall. We had control. And we started negotiating with the administration and we told the President we want to have our Department not entered in by police while we are negotiating. We also wanted to have our interim chairperson, while the permanent person was being sort of selected, but we already had somebody in mind, because one person that we really had in mind and that was another slogan that we had was...

"Sánchez, si! Lugo, no!" Our chant was, "Sanchez, si! Lugo, no!" We, the department and the students, want María Sánchez as our Chairperson, and we rejected the administration's candidate, Elba Lugo and we had taken over the Bursars Office, they threatened to bring in the police and take over the Department of Puerto Rican Studies. And we formed a blockade and decided that we will not allow them to bring in and seat that Chairperson by force of police into our Department and the students rally and stopped the police and the Chairperson and the President from bringing her and seating her in the Chair in the Department of Puerto Rican Studies. And the students stayed firm, we started negotiating with the President and we said we'll give you back the Registrars Office, if you let us have the other office across the hall. And we utilized that office to create the Office of the Institute of Puerto Rican Studies at Brooklyn College.

So we had the Department of Puerto Rican Studies and the Institute Puerto Rican studies. And now we had the interim chairperson. At that point, we started negotiating and one of the things that we did is we were negotiating with the President all through the night, I was part of the negotiating team. And we said that we have people downstairs in the offices, and they're very hungry, and it's late at night, we haven't eaten. And they said to us, well, we can't get anything at night around here and we said Juniors restaurant, on Dekalb Avenue, on the other side of

Flatbush, is open 24 hours and you can get the food and they did get us the food. They got us hamburgers, french fries and sodas, and everything from Juniors, came from the Juniors and that paved the way for us to be able to then negotiate further, but the struggle didn't stay right there. We had more pickets.

[00:49:27]

Finally, at the end of the semester, they decided that they would allow our Chairperson to sit at the head of the Department. It was a long struggle that we had over two years, but we had decided that the self determination of our department and the cause of the Department should be decided by the students of the Department and the faculty of the Department and not by the administration, and that our curriculum, should also reflect that, that is the decision and the Department on that basis started growing fantastically, and student participation, the curriculum was revised. We had more input from different people from different campuses and scholars in the field of Puerto Rican Studies that added to the scholarship of the Puerto Rican Studies Department and which allowed the Department to get national recognition for being one of the most advanced Departments of Puerto Rican Studies.

Pam Sporn

That's an awesome story, an awesome victory.

Crecensio Morales

It was a struggle at which we had casualties, we did have along the way from 1968, throughout, we had students who didn't make it through their courses but sacrificed themselves. We had students who died because of the emotional distress that they suffered being arrested in '68, which is something that we were able to avoid in the struggle of '73, '74, '75.

Pam Sporn

I have a question. You mentioned before that you didn't want to go to jail and that's why you went, when you were drafted that you decided you had to go because you didn't want to go to jail. When you came back to Brooklyn College in '73, '74, you were leading a struggle and got arrested what made the difference? Why were you willing to get arrested for this struggle over the self determination Puerto Rican Studies Department?

Crecensio Morales

We, at least my personal decision for thinking about getting, allowing myself to get arrested was that this was a struggle that I felt personally invested in. That I felt was one that was worthwhile to pursue, that I felt that it was for the betterment of our community and for the empowerment of our community, the Puerto Rican community. And that would allow us to institutionalize the Department of Puerto Rican Studies, so that it will become a permanent place and recognized as a permanent part of the Brooklyn College and the larger academia community.

Pam Sporn So, what would you say? Are there any other important anecdotes or stories that you would say about the your activism at Brooklyn College, in the Puerto Rican Alliance? Were there some really other special moments maybe not where you were being arrested or protesting, but some of the other kind of work that you did was there anything in these in these...

Crecensio Morales We were able to do a lot of things that we would never be able to do before through the struggle. And that is to be a permanent part and a recognized part of the community of the student body of Brooklyn College, and also being part of the academic life of Brooklyn College.

We were able to do things like have our food cooked in the Student Union building, although some of the administrators of the Union building didn't think that our food and our cuisine was actually that flavorful and the aroma permeated the student building and that was one thing that could never happened before, but they had to recognize that there was different cultures, and that those different cultures you had to respect their, the way people live. And so we were able to share that with the rest of the community and not be ashamed and have people be proud of what we were doing. We had dances, where we were able to have Latin American music, and even Latin American and Salsa bands come into the campus and be funded by Student Government and by the administration, and do cultural activities that were sponsored and funded by Brooklyn College, which was never, happened before. We were having representation within the student body, and we even had a Student Government President elected that was Puerto Rican through the support of the Puerto Rican Alliance, and other student organizations. So we were able to work collectively as part of the whole community in Brooklyn College and not be isolated and not have any power within the community.

Crecensio Morales [00:55:50]
I was a person who was not given a lot of chances, or, not seen as capable within the academic community, and not acceptable to be in the university level, to graduating with three majors within Brooklyn College and then going on to do a Masters of Science in Education degree. And so it showed at least me as one person, and that there were many more other individuals who are lacking the opportunity or the resources, but with the proper motivation and proper resources were able to succeed. And I think that's my life story.

Pam Sporn Do you think that your involvement in this movement for the Puerto Rican Studies and for against the war, the whole time period you were a Brooklyn College student, do you think being involved in those

movements had something to do with your success as, in graduating with these degrees?

Crecensio Morales Being involved in the struggle was a learning experience for me and an empowering experience. One of the things I did was work with Puerto Rican Alliance organization, and I was doing the newsletter for the Puerto Rican Alliance. So I was able to do my writing skills and do my journalistic writing within that and get other students involved, and empower them to be able to express themselves and express their own opinions. It also helped me to work within the organization. And so we had different parts of PRA. Among them was our Communications Committee, our Finance Committees. That taught us how to work with organizations and raise money. We also were able to do sports and participate in the intramural sports of the campus. We had our own little team called "Mofongo."
"Mofongo" actually is a Puerto Rican dish made out of, mashed plantains, which is very good. There's just been us thinking about Mofongo, was that it was also a time to for fun, and that's what that allowed us to do when we were doing sports.

Pam Sporn We you a teacher afterwards? What it what did you do as a career after you got out of college?

Crecensio Morales After I got out of college, I worked for a time with Brooklyn College as an Assistant in the Writing Lab. The Writing lab was a place where students could come and get work and assistance on their essay writing and reading skills from, that was a temporary job and from there, I went to ASPRIA of New York and I worked there as a basic skills instructor and from basic skills instructor, I worked at City College, and I became the Director of the Student Support Services Program at City College. And from there I went on to be Deputy Director of ASPIRA for all the programs in New York City and then I decided that I would do a degree in counseling. So I got my Masters of Science in education in Bilingual Counseling from Bank Street college, which I utilized to go and work in Long Beach in Long Island at the request of the community organization, "Circulo Hispanidad," they were working within that high school community to get a bilingual person but they did not, the administration said they couldn't find anyone. But I was contacted by Professor Nadal at Brooklyn College, and he informed me of the need for a bilingual person to work with the Latino community in Long Beach and I accepted the challenge. And I was there for 24 years and I worked with students from all different countries, not only Latinos, and it empowered me to work with students who had very little language skills and had fears of the building and administration, of high school administration and I was able to work with them and

empower them and help them graduate in larger numbers. And I created, developed the ASPRIA Club in Long Beach, which was there for 24 years and even after I left and retired that club is still organized and working because the students feel very much part of it culturally, and because it empowers them for the future.
[topic transition]

Tami Gold

[01:01:40]

What do you mean you stayed out of jail that 18 years?

Crecensio Morales

The reason I didn't want to get arrested to go to Canada or go to Canada to avoid the draft was that for 18 years, I tried to stay out of being part of the prison population where we are very well represented. But I was running with people in the community who were actually called...Let me rephrase. Okay.

The reason I didn't want to go to jail or I stayed out of the jail for that time, was that in my community there's young people, the lives of young Puerto Ricans, young Puerto Rican's destiny was either to drop out of school, go to jail, do drugs, and all of those things I had stayed out of and I didn't want that type of life for myself. So I didn't want that type but I didn't want to go to jail, just because I wasn't going to the service, because I thought I had better chances of surviving Vietnam then I did of having the streets.

Tami Gold

I just want to ask, what were the streets like in Brooklyn? I didn't live in Brooklyn, what were they like? Were they really tough?

Crecensio Morales

The streets in Brooklyn when I was growing up, was a place of very little opportunity for recreation, for education. It was a place where people basically were unemployed. Or they were in gangs at that time and the drugs in my community, Brooklyn was impoverished and...(background audio).

Tami Gold

When did you realize you were Puerto Rican?

Crecensio Morales

I was, my experience of, when did I realize I was Puerto Rican? I realized I was Puerto Rican when I first left (pause)

I'm thinking about when I first had to defend myself as being a Puerto Rican. And that was when I went to down south and to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. And I was confronted first by some white soldiers from the south, who were looking at me as a person from another planet. A stranger, a foreigner, someone who didn't belong, and they treated me that

way and they isolated me, and they left, me as an individual, so I was not able to interact there.

[01:05:08]

I started realizing that I was Puerto Rican because I met other Puerto Ricans down there, and they didn't speak English, and I didn't speak Spanish, but we knew we had something in common. And that was our heritage and where we came from the families. So that exposed me to being Puerto Rican.

All my life. I had a sense of living in the culture, but I didn't have the culture living in me. And so I didn't understand really what it was to be Puerto Rican. I was Puerto Rican in name, but not in feeling and living as a Puerto Rican. So it was when I went down south that I actually had to decide, you know, I am Puerto Rican. Before that, I didn't feel Puerto Rican. I didn't want to be Puerto Rican. Because of my experience in elementary school. I was a little kid in the second grade speaking Spanish to one of my little friends in the yard in the school and the principal and this great booming voice came over and said, "Stop speaking Spanish." He said, "You are in America. You cannot speak Spanish here. You will not speak Spanish," and that caused a trauma in me that I went back home, and I couldn't tell my parents what had happened. And from that day on, I didn't want to even speak Spanish. I didn't want eat Spanish. I didn't want to be Puerto Rican. And it wasn't until I knew that I had to defend myself in the army, like much later on in my life, that I had to decide, you know what, I am who I am, and I'm proud of being who I am. I'm proud that my parents are Puerto Rican. And the saying says, "My parents are Puerto Rican, my friends are Puerto Rican, so I'm Puerto Rican too."

Tami Gold

How do you feel now? I mean how do you feel about where we are? How do you feel about where the struggle is?

Crecensio Morales

I feel that we are on a different stage in the struggle, we are in the stage where we have a history that we, a known history that we know. We have people in our community who have different positions that would never had before, that they have access to governmental administration building services. We have a whole different community with a whole lot of different possibilities. But it's now a question of that. We've lost the organizational part of our struggle. We've gone through a phase where we were very strong, and we were a movement. And it was a movement where people were actually consciously deciding to be part of the movement. At this time, I don't see that we have that. We have a different struggle now. We have a lot of things that we have to re-learn and re-do, a lot of re-education.

Crecensio Morales It was interesting that when we were given the subpoenas, we were told that the police would come in and arrest us. And it was the faculty and the lawyers who decided that the police can be brought into the campus at that time, even at the behest of the administration, that they would have to go through a lot of procedures before anyone could be arrested on campus for protesting. So that is why they brought in the federal marshals. The purpose of federal marshals was to avoid that confrontation. And it was also because the reaction of the people to seeing students arrested by police and possibly beaten by police, that made the administration refrain from bringing the police in.

Tami This is my last thing. Puerto Rico has been hit really hard, economically and by a global climate crisis. I feel a lot for Puerto Ricans on the island. It feels devastating. What do you feel about the situation, specifically the island?

Crecensio Morales [01:10:04]
Most recently the Hurricane Maria and Irma devastating Puerto Rico is something that is so shocking and so emotionally distressing to me and my family and all my friends who even have knowledge of, they are not even Puerto Ricans, but they realize that this is a situation that was dire for Puerto Ricans. But my feeling was that Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans have been through a lot, they have a long history of struggle. They have a long history of going through changes. Unemployment during, when the factories works had shut down, the economy changed in Puerto Rico. When the police had gone through the early '50s and had repressed the Puerto Ricans and even had fought against the Puerto Ricans demonstrating or putting their Puerto Rican flags on they could be beaten or arrested.

Puerto Ricans have gone through the community here in New York, and Chicago, and they've started with very little, and we've come a long way, the Puerto Rican community has a lot of resources within themselves and this is what I think we need to begin to re-instill that we bring that to the consciousness of the Puerto Rican people. And we can see that the island is coming back and so that shows you that we can survive anything. That the Puerto Rican people, so I have a very positive vision of the potential and the way that Puerto Ricans have dealt with adversity.
[topic transition]

Tami Gold [01:12:15]
I didn't hear you, what?

Crecensio Morales We had to put together, Puerto Ricans, bathrooms in the Registrars Office. So we had to wall off part of it and utilize the, the place because we couldn't come out with the Registrars Office. Because once we got out, we

wouldn't be able to get back in. There was just, there was all sorts of things like that. We have to we had to utilize the wastepaper basket as part of the bathroom facilities. Yeah, because we couldn't get out of the offices. While well if we got out of the offices, we couldn't get back in. So it was decided, you know, and then we had to decide who would get arrested and who would not because we didn't want to have the leadership decapitated, totally. We realized that most of the time it was that the police would try to criminalize the movement and the arrest the whole leadership of the movement. So that's why only 44 people got arrested. Because we consciously made this decision that this part of our movement would be sacrificing in this way and we know that the people would be sacrificing in another way. So we didn't feel any ill will to anyone for being arrested. And we just said that, that's part of what we do.

Tami Gold

And what about..."Que bonita bandera..." did you sing that?

Crecensio Morales

Oh, we sang, "Que bonita bandera..." and we sang, "Temporal, Temporal, aqui viene el Temporal," and a lot of songs that were Plenas from Puerto Rico that we were able to do. That helped us also be motivated but also learn more about the culture also and the spirit of struggle. This was a struggle that went before us and that we inherited and that is our legacy that we need to continue to instill and empower our community.

Can you sing any of those songs?

I don't sing (laughter) I don't sing unless you sing. You want to sing?

"Que bonita bandera, Que bonita bandera, Que bonita bandera es la bandera Puertorriqueña. Mas bonita afuera, mas bonita afuera, mas bonita a fuera si la otra no estuviera."

[End of recorded material at 01:14:58]